

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9651

INFO AMEMBASSY CENBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY K ALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4451

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SN

SUBJECT: RAJARATNAM'S OUTSPOKEN REMARKS DURING VISIT TO
AUSTRALIA

REF: SINGAPORE 4355

1. SUMMARY: DURING PAST WEEK STRAITS TIMES HAS
REPORTED NUMBER OF OUTSPOKEN COMMENTS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MADE BY FORMIN RAJARATNAM DURING HIS CURRENT VISIT TO
AUSTRALIA. THESE HAVE INCLUDED AUSTRALIAN WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND
FORCES FROM FPDA, THE SERIOUS IMPACT WHICH A REVOLUTIONARY
POST WAR VIETNAM COULD HAVE ON SEA, THE IMPORTANCE
OF GREAT POWER INVOLVEMENT IN SEA, AND THE POSSIBLE
INCLUSION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND IN ASEAN.
JARATNAM'S WILLINGNESS TO RISK THE POSSIBLE DISPLEASURE
OF HIS HOSTS IN MAKING OUTSPOKEN REMARKS AT VARIANCE WITH
WHITLAM'S FOREIGN POLICIES INDICATES THE EXTENT TO WHICH
RECENT MAJOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AND U.S. DOMESTIC
POLITICAL SITUATION HAVE CREATED ANXIETIES IN TOP GOS
LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.
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2. DURING THE PAST WEEK THE STRAITS TIMES HAS REPORTE
FOLLOWING OUTSPOKEN REMARKS ON VARIOUS FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBJECTS BY FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM DURING HIS
CURRENT OFFICIAL VIS T AND LECTURE TOUR IN AUSTRALIA:

3. FPDA: IN TV INTERVIEW IN CANBERRA, RAJARATNAM WARNED OF A SUBSTANTIAT ALTERATION IN RELATIONS BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND AUSTRALIA IF PRESENT FIVE POWER ARRANGEMENT COLLAPSED BECAUSE OF AUSTRALIA'S WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND FORCES. HE CAUTIONED THAT COMMUNIST LIBERATION FORCES IN THE AREA WERE INCRASING AND THAT THE 1970'S AND 80'S, INSTEAD OF BEING STABLE, COULD BE AN ERA OF EVEN GREATER UPHEAVAL/ CONSEQUENTLY, HE HAD COME TO CANBERRA TO TRY TO PERSUADE THE LABOR GOVERNMENT NOT TO MAKE SUCH A WITHDRAWAL. HE NOTED SINGAPORE'S ATTITUDE WAS MUCH NEARER TO THAT OF NEW ZEALAND WHICH HAD ANNOUNCED IT WOULD NOT WITHDRAW TROOPS. (ACCORDINGIPTRAITS TIMES, RAJARATNAM'S REMARKS PROMPTED PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM TO REAFFIRM AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS IN SEA.)

4. VIETNAM: IN LECTURE ON SOUTHEAST ASIA IN TRANSITION, RAJARATNAM COMMENTED IT WAS AN ILLUSION TO THINK THAT AS A RESULT OF DETENTE AND END OF AMERICAN PRESENCE IN VIETNAM, SEA PROBLEMS COULD AND SHOULD BE TACKLED BY SOUTHEAST ASIANS AND THAT SUCH ISSUES NO LONGER CONCERN THE OUTSIDE WORLD. DESCRIBING THIS BELIEF AS "DANGEROUS FALLACY"HE SAID POST-VIETNAM SEA WOULD BE MORE OF AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM IN THE YEARS AHEAD THAN IT WAS EVER BEFORE. PARIS PEACE ACCORD HAD DONE NOTHING MORE THAN END THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIET AM. THE NEXT STAGE - THE POLITICAL AND ARMED STRUGGLE FOR TOTAL VICTORY IN VIETNAM - WOULD HAVE REPERCUSSIONS OUTSIDE VIETNAM. THE EMERGENCE OF A COMMUNIST VIETNAM AND A RADICAL INDO-CHINA WOULD BE A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST TO THE HITHERTO ANEMIC NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE REGIONOM A VIETNAM OPENLY OR COVERTLY COMMITTED TO SOME KIND OF REVOLUTIONARSWMISSION COULD SPARK OFF INTRA-REGIONAL WARS OF SERIOUS PROPORTIONS.

5. GREAT POWER INVOLVEMENT IN SEA: IN TV INTERVIEW
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IN SYDNEY, RAJARATNAM REITERATED FAMILIAR GOS THEME THAT "OUR GENERAL APPROACH TO SECURITY IS TO HAVE ALL THE BIG POWERS IN THE AREA". SINGAPORE WOULD NOT POSITIVELY ENCOURAGE COUNTRIES TO ENTER THE AREA, BUT "WE ARE NOT GOING TO PUT ANY STUMBLING BLOCKS IN THEIR WAY." HE DID NOT LIKE TO SEE THE FOUR GREAT POWERS DEPLOYING SIZEABLE MILITARY FORCES IN THE AREA, BUT WITH SMALLER FORCES THEY COUNTER BALANCED ONE ANOTHER. "IF THE RUSSIANS ARE THERE BY THEMSELVES ONLY, THEN I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ACCOMODATE MYSELF MORE AND MOR TITH THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE THE POWER THERE." HE NOTED THAT THE BREZHNEV ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY SCHEME WAS A GOOD IDEA IN PRINCIPLE, BUT QUESTIONED WHAT COUNTRIES WOULD BE INCLUDED.

6. IN SUBSEQUENT LECTURE AT AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, RAJA FORECAST THAT WHATEVER ITS PRESENT RESERVATIONS, THE U.S. WOULD BE COMPELLED TO TAKE PART IN THE NEW SEA BALANCE OF POWER GAME ALONG WITH THE RUSSIANS, CHINESE, JAPANESE AND EEC COUNTRIES. THE ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE FOR THE U.S. TO SHED ITS GREAT POWER STATUS AND REDUCE ITSELF TO A SECOND CLASS OR THIRD RATE POWER. "I CANNOT SEE A GREAT ECONOMIC AND MILITARY POWER PRACTICING THIS KIND OF POLITICAL MINIATURIZATION WITHOUT SOONER OR LATER EXPLODING AT THE SEAMS."

7. ASEAN: IN SAME TV INTERVIEW CITED ABOVE RAJA SAID SINGAPORE WOULD WELCOME INCLUSION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND IN ASEAN. HE NOTED THAT HE COULD NOT SPEAK FOR THE OTHER ASEAN GOVERNMENTS.

8. COMMENT: RAJARATNAM'S REMARKS ARE CLEARLY CONSISTENT WITH GENERAL OUTLOOK OF GOS FOREIGN POLICY. HOWEVER, IT MUST BE NOTED THIS WAS FIRST TIME TOP GOS OFFICIAL HAD EXPRESSED PUBLIC DISPLEASURE OVER AUSTRALIAN WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND FORCES FROM SINGAPORE AND FIRST TIME GOS HAD PUBLICLY SAID BREZHNEV ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY SCHEME WAS A GOOD IDEA IN PRINCIPLE. GOS HAS ALSO FOR FIRST TIME PUBLICLY WELCOMED INCLUSION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND INTO ASEAN (A POSITION WHICH GOS MUST KNOW WOULD NOT BE WELCOME IN JAKARTA AND KUALA LUMPUR).
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9. KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT RAJARATNAM, WHO FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE IN EXTENDED PUBLIC DISCUSSION WITHOUT SAYING SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT, WAS SPEAKING ON ABOVE MATTERS LARGELY AT HIS OWN INITIATIVE. ALTHOUGH LEE ALMOST CERTAINLY SHARES MOST OF THE SAME VIEWS, IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER HE WOULD HAVE SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED RAJARATNAM TO UNDERTAKE A MAJOR CAMPAIGN TO EDUCATE THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC TO THE GOS POINT OF VIEW - AN ACTION WHICH MIGHT POSSIBLY BE INTERPRETED AS GOS INTERVENTION IN AUSTRALIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS AND IF TAKEN AMISS BY GOA, WOULD BE AN UNFORTUNATE PRECURSOR TO WHITLAM'S FORTHCOMING VISIT HERE. HOWEVER, LEE HAS BEEN DISTURBED OVER GENERAL TREND IN WHITLAM'S FOREIGN POLICIES AND UNDOUBTEDLY RECOGNIZES THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF REJE'S EFFORT TO EDUCATE THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC.

10. IN ANY EVENT RAJARATNAM'S WILLINGNESS TO BE QUITE SO OUTSPOKEN IN PUBLIC TO THE POINT OF RISKING THE DISPLEASURE OF HIS HOSTS INDICATES THE EXTENT TO WHICH RECENT EVENTS (THAI STUDENT REVOLT, MIDDLE EAST WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON GOS PETROLEUM SITUATION, U.S. PREOCCUPATION WITH WATERGATE, CONTINUING PLIGHT OF LONNOL GOVERNMENT AND RISING GOS

CONCERN OVER EROSION OF PARIS PEACE AGREEMENTS) HAVE
CREATED ANXIETY IN TOP GOS LEADERSHIP. CERTAINLY
RAJARATNAM'S COMMENTS ARE FULLY CONSISTENT WITH LEE'S
PESSIMISM REPORTED REFTEL.
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<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

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